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ON THE COMMANDER ISLANDS

By T. LYTKIN

Meet some of our neighbors who have established a well-ordered and friendly community on islands only a few miles from Alaska

WHAT a relief it is today to know that in the North Pacific we have for neighbors our great Ally, the Soviet people.

Yet there have been Americans who sought to alarm us, and to provoke suspicion and enmity between the American and Soviet peoples. There have been Americans who preferred to see aggression-mad Japan as our neighbor in these lands.

To say have been is too optimistic. For only a month ago, in the June 6th issue of *Collier's Magazine*, George Renner, a professor at Teachers College and an American convert to the Nazi pseudo-science, Geo-Politics, proposed as one of the conditions for post-war peace handing over the Soviet Pacific coasts to Japan.

A few days after the publication of this appeaser proposal by the professor, the offer to the Japanese of other people's lands, a Japanese expeditionary force landed on the island of Attu, easternmost of the American Aleutian archipelago. As we go to press they are being taken care of by our military forces.

Attu's nearest neighbors are the Soviet Commander Islands. It was these very islands that anti-Soviet provocators not so long ago sought to turn into an issue of suspicion and ill will between the American and Soviet peoples.

Lytkin's article describes life on these Soviet islands, neighbors of ours in the North Pacific. It was written in times of peace and gives us an insight into the life of a people whom we can gladly and truly call good neighbors.

Each day the first to turn the pages of the day-by-day calendar, are the inhabitants of Bering and Medny Islands off the coast of Kamchatka. Only a few miles of water separate these people of the far eastern USSR from their neighbors on the Aleutian Islands of American Alaska. But through these waters passes the international time boundary line. The day of the Bering and Medny Islanders begins a full twenty-four hours earlier than that of the nearby Alaska Aleutians a few miles away. Continuing

East, from the Commander Islands, the day begins later and later until the time circle is closed back at the neighboring American Aleutian islands, only a few miles away, but a whole day later.

Bering and Medny are two of the islands in the Commander group, discovered by Commodore Vitus Bering. The famous explorer lies buried there, and his name is borne by the nearby sea and strait. He perished while on an expedition sent to discover whether Asia was connected with North America. The expedition was commissioned by Peter the Great. Bering and his party set out in 1737, in two packet boats, "St. Peter" and "St. Paul." After sailing for three years they arrived at the Bay of Avachinsk on the Eastern coast of Kamchatka. Here they camped for the first winter, and out of their camp grew the town of Petropavlovsk (Peter and Paul).

It was to this city in Kamchatka that we set out in the summer of 1940 to photograph life on the Commander Islands. We went by air in a fine, forty-seater passenger plane piloted by the well-known Far Eastern pilots Ovechkin and Derkunsky. We were able to see below us, as we flew, the Amur River, vital artery of the Maritime Province; Komsomolsk, one of the new pioneer cities of the east built by the Soviet Communist youth; Nikolayevsk at the Amur's mouth; and then across the Tartar Straits that runs between Sakhalin Island and the mainland, and over the Northern Soviet half of this large and mountainous island. (The Southern half is Japanese.) Above the island we climbed to an altitude of 8,000 feet. Soon we were over the Okhotsk Sea, at this point

at about six hundred miles wide. Through breaks in the clouds we caught glimpses of the sparkling waters below. Across the sea lay Kamchatka, where we finally came down at the city of Petropavlovsk.

There we boarded the Steamer "Neptune," a 3,500-ton vessel. The "Neptune" put out to sea, but dropped anchor for the night because of a fog. We could see nothing through the mist, but the captain told us the Commander Islands were not far away.

In the morning we found ourselves among the reefs, about 700 feet from the shore of Bering Island, where the daring explorer is buried. Before us lay the little village of Nikolskoye. It consisted of a group of about thirty loghouses nestling in a protected cove. Our arrival caused a great stir and the people came running to the beach. Normally, they have such a visit only once a year when a supply vessel brings the inhabitants their annual stock of provisions, fuel and other requirements. Our appearance meant an extra ration of excitement in addition to other extras.

As there was no protected harbor and a heavy sea was running, the "Neptune" had to shun the shore, and we were taken off in a small Aleutian boat. In the boat we noticed a number of small animals roaming like house pets in the cabins. We were to see many of them all over the island. They were the famous blue foxes, whose fur assumes the modish blue tint in the winter, that adds to their value in the fur market.

The Commander Islands abound in these foxes which are bred on the islands and behave like domesticated

(Continued on page 26)

General view of Nikolsky Village on the Commander Islands



JULY 1942



Where "The Ho" A review

RUSSIA'S FIGHTING FORCES by
Sergei N. Kournakoff. Duell,
& Pearce, \$2.50. Paper bound.
International Publishers, \$3.50

A PASSIONATE pride in the achievements of the Red Army deep love for the Russian people through every page of "Russia's Fighting Forces." Captain Sergei N. Kournakoff has dedicated his book "to the descent of Alexander Nevski; to the grand Suvorov, and to the sons of Cha. This dedication is the clue to the

COMMANDER ISLANDS

(Continued from page 23)

pets. There are also beavers, and a great variety of birds as well. But the islands are most famous for their large sealing grounds.

The first known settlers on these islands were the Unargens, a tribe from the Aleutian Islands. They came in 1826. When the report of the Bering expedition was made public, fur trappers from all parts of the world flocked to the islands. Bent on quick large profits, they hunted down the valuable fur animals to the point of extinction and ruthlessly exploited the native inhabitants.

When the islands were taken over by the Soviet government the fur industry was on the verge of ruin. In 1924 the number of seals in the area was estimated at 3,000. Today there are about 50,000 on the protected sealing grounds.

These are about twelve and a half miles from Nikolskoye. Navigation laws prohibit steamers sailing in the vicinity from using sirens or searchlights, so that the animals will not be disturbed.

We piled our cinema gear on sledges drawn by dogs. I think this is the only place where dogs are used to pull sledges in the summer. The boggy ground is almost as smooth under the runners as snow. We went speeding to our destination, with Joseph Nozhikov, an extremely skillful hunter, guiding us through the tall grass.

Suddenly a wonderful scene opened before us. Literally within a stone's throw, thousands and thousands of

seals and their cubs were gamboling in the water, or basking on the beach. They were all a deep, dark brown, and some of the bulls were as large as horses.

This is the place where the seals breed and spend most of the year. In December they swim south, to Japan, but they return every spring.

Great care of the pack is taken by the staff of the hunting station on the islands. Every year they kill only a certain number of the three-year-old "bachelors," males who have not acquired a "harems." The hunters leave the rest for breeding purposes. This ensures a steady increase in the pack.

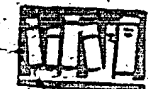
The people of the Commander Islands constitute a well-ordered and friendly community. Scurvy, that terrible scourge of the past, has been completely eradicated. The diet now consists of fresh vegetables, fish, pork, sugar and sweets, in addition to the venison from the reindeer herds introduced on the island, seal meat, wild bird's eggs and game that are obtained on the islands. All the houses have electric lights and radios. In Nikolskoye and Preobrazhenskoye there are clubs, libraries, amateur art circles and bands.

Because of the situation of the islands in the Northern Sea, they are also the site of weather and scientific stations. In the work of the meteorological observatories and in the veterinary and other technical stations much of the professional work is done by the natives. The Aleutian, Badayev, transmitting from the island radio station, is considered one of the best radio operators in the Far North. The Aleutians A. Maltseva, a woman, and V. Adodurov are zootechnicians on the State animal breeding farm located on the island.

The Aleutian District was the first in the Far North of the USSR where the whole population became literate. The islanders now have their own newspaper, "Aleutskaya Pravda," and they listen eagerly every day to the broadcast of news and other programs from Moscow. The people surrounded me while I ground out my film, fascinated, as every community is, at the actual process of picture taking. However, the cinema has long passed the stage of novelty for them. They have movies regularly.

Through movies, radio, airplane and their own advancing culture, these people of the Commander Islands in the midst of the Northern seas, are an integral part of the life of our country.

SOVIET RUSSIA TODAY



his country. To him "My country" is not an abstract conception but an economic and social reality which the Red Army has helped to create.

Captain Kournakoff tells us all this in a simplicity of style that makes reading for the expert and the layman alike. His book contains more than any other book published on the subject. This makes it difficult to do justice in a brief review beyond that it contains just about everything there is to know about the Red Army and everything that is necessary in order to understand the past course of war as well as the current campaign on the Eastern front.

It also enables us to draw some conclusions as to what the future may hold for us. What of the future? I can say no better than to quote more words from Kournakoff:

A second front will enable the United States to win a three-year war by knockout instead of winning a ten-year war by decision. . . . There can be no truce front, either in the air or on the ground.

Only a full-fledged offensive on a firm, supported, of course, by the navy and supplied under the protection of the navies, can bring about the end of Hitler. Europe is a powder keg.

But, it cannot be lighted with an atomic bomb. The Nazi-subjugated peoples must see their liberators with their own eyes and touch them with their hands. Only then will the powder keg explode. That explosion will rid the world of Hitlerism for all time.

"Russia's Fighting Forces" is a read-aloud "must" for anyone interested in the victory of the United Nations.

Practice Dogfight Caldwell

It is of combat explains why Soviet soldiers and Red Armymen alike can never be conquered. These things are written between the lines on page after page until at last when the final paragraph is reached, the most skeptical of readers wonders why he ever allowed himself to doubt the ability of the Russians to successfully defend themselves against Hitler's aggression.

"Russia's Don't Surrender" is the story of a handful of Red Armymen engaged for a month by the German army. These men, cut off from their supplies, have no thought of surrender. Under almost constant attack by dive bombers, artillery, or infantry, they defend themselves during the day and move by foot during the night towards the front and the main body of the Red Army. Sleepless, foodless, and fearless, they break through the ring of encirclement, cross the front after setting two human detachments to fighting each other, and reach their own lines. While employing guerrilla tactics to

VIET RUSSIA TODAY

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